

From: myvoice@oneclickpolitics.com
To: [emnrd-parkscomments](#), [EMNRD](#)
Subject: [EXTERNAL] Fairness and equality not present in NM State Parks proposal
Date: Friday, March 1, 2024 7:29:09 PM

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Re: Fairness and equality not present in NM State Parks proposal

Dear Public Comment,

Despite a surplus of funds, the EMNRD is choosing to shift financial burdens onto its citizens through state park fee and recreational fee increases and eliminating the annual camping pass. The increased fees and new fees will make activities like camping, boating, and paddle sports unaffordable for many New Mexicans. It is especially burdensome for low and middle-income families and senior citizens on fixed incomes. During the legislative session, the proposed fee changes were not disclosed during the department's budget hearings. Attempting to get around the legislative process is a very deceptive practice and the people of New Mexico deserve better from their state agencies. Healthy debate and constructive input were eliminated since the Department knows the public will have limited ability to attend their "public hearings." The decision to raise fees contradicts the principles of fairness and equity, especially considering the state's healthy financial position. It raises questions about the state's priorities and whether it is truly acting in the best interests of its citizens by choosing to burden them with unnecessary financial obligations. The State Parks Division falls under the Energy, Minerals, and Natural Resources Department and is expected to produce 75% of its own annual operating budget through park fees and other sources of self-generated revenue. Many of the parks have been understaffed and operating on a limited budget "just to get by," according to Wendy Mason, the state parks marketing and public relations manager. The Federal government Land and Water Conservation Fund was started in the 1960's to enhance parks among other things. In 2021, \$973,000 dollars was swept because it was not obligated or spent. In 2022, \$2 million was swept back and in 2023 another \$2.1 million was spent back. Due to mismanagement, almost \$5 million of Federal funds went unused. The EMNRD was well aware of the \$3.48 million of surplus funds for Fiscal Year 2025. Why didn't the EMNRD request additional funding to cover the shortfall? Working with the Legislative Financial Committee and the State Legislature, funding from the General Fund can be appropriated to enterprise agencies. The budget surplus was generated by hardworking citizens of New Mexico. Do not penalize them through increased fees to access state parks and recreational facilities. The New Mexico state agency employee vacancy rate is greater than 20%, thus an excess of funds to pay employee salaries. Why not reprogram excess funds designated for salaries to cover operating costs? The study states that a public hearing will be held on April 1, 2024 with a goal to implement rule changes on July 1, 2024. Most state agencies require 6 - 12 months to promulgate, publish and conduct a public education campaign to new rules changes. The New Mexico State Parks study is flawed in several aspects. 1. The only alternative considered to increasing revenue was increasing fees. 2. Comparison to other states park fees was minimal. The New Mexico State Parks Fees Study does not establish a correlation to neighboring states increasing their respective fees. 3. The study was conducted by an internal committee of State Park employees. This could be construed as a biased study. I respectfully request that you do not approve the proposed rule changes, go back and include the people you will affect instead of relying on a biased study to

affirm your desired outcome.

Sincerely,

Mr. Marvin Schott

maschott@comcast.net

14419 Alene Court NE Albuquerque, NM 87123 Constituent

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